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Prezentační a komunikační dovednosti v anglickém jazyce u vysokoškolských studentů

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Autor práce: **Alena Nyčová**
Vedoucí práce: PaedDr. Zuzana Šaffková, CSc., M.A.





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Presentation and Communication Skills in English of Undergraduate Students

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Author: **Alena Nyčová**
Supervisor: PaedDr. Zuzana Šaffková, CSc., M.A.



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Jméno a příjmení: Alena Nyčová
Osobní číslo: P13000202
Studijní program: B7507 Specializace v pedagogice
Studijní obory: Český jazyk a literatura se zaměřením na vzdělávání
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Vedoucí bakalářské práce:

PaedDr. Zuzana Šaffková, CSc., M.A.

Katedra anglického jazyka

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doc. RNDr. Miroslav Brzezina, CSc.
děkan

L.S.



PhDr. Marcela Malá, M.A., Ph.D.
vedoucí katedry

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Anotace

Bakalářská práce se zabývá prezentačními a komunikačními dovednostmi v angličtině u vysokoškolských studentů. Jejím cílem je zjistit a pojmenovat problémy, se kterými se studenti během prezentování v anglickém jazyce potýkají. K tomuto výzkumu byl použit dotazník sestavený autorkou práce, který byl předložen 75 studentům angličtiny na Technické univerzitě v Liberci. Výsledky byly analyzovány a na jejich základě byl s pomocí poznatků z teoretické části sestaven návrh zásad, které by mohly problémy při prezentování řešit.

Klíčová slova: studijní dovednosti, prezentace, vizuální pomůcky, téma, hlas, neverbální komunikace

Annotation

The bachelor thesis deals with presentation and communication skills in English of undergraduate students. The aim of the thesis is to find out and specify the difficulties which the students face while presenting in English. For the purposes of the research, a questionnaire created by the author of the thesis was used and distributed to 75 students of English at the Technical University in Liberec. The results were analysed by means of descriptive analysis. Following from both the results and the theory, a proposal of presentation principles was compiled in order to help the students improve their presentation skills.

Key words: study skills, presentation, visual aids, stage fright, voice, nonverbal communication

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Introduction

The ability to present clearly and confidently is one of the skills which the undergraduate students need for their academic achievement. Furthermore, presentation skills are essential not only during the university studies but also in job interviews or future working life. These skills can be developed and practised.

Presenting is one of the assessment methods at universities. In order to get a credit, the students are required to give oral presentation about given topic to the rest of the class. Furthermore, presentation serves as a means of feedback on what the students have learned, and presentation is also a part of the final examinations when the students defend their final papers. However, public speaking is difficult, even frightening for many students. Moreover, many students do not know what the right principles for presenting are.

For that reason the aim of this bachelor thesis is to identify the difficulties which the undergraduate students of English face while presenting and propose techniques for making public speeches as easy and effective as possible.

The thesis consists of a theoretical and a practical part. The theoretical part addresses study skills which are the most important for academic achievement at universities in the first chapter and then discusses several aspects which are necessary for an effective presentation in more detail in the second chapter.

The practical part concentrates on identifying the difficulties that the students have when giving presentations and uses the information from the theoretical part. For this purpose a questionnaire was created as a research method. The practical part includes an evaluation of the results from the questionnaires and a suggestion of the techniques that would help the students to cope with presentation difficulties.

The bachelor thesis is trying to help the students of English realize what the most problematic issue is for them when they present, and acquaint them with the strategies and techniques which might make presenting easier for them.

1 Study skills

Study skills are the skills which are necessary for academic achievement. People are not born with them, therefore, these skills can be learned and developed. The term “study skills” covers many different areas. The following skills are the most important for academic success.

Learning at college involves a number of skills that require training. The study skill which many students consider difficult is critical reading which is necessary for doing research for writing essays or simply for finding information needed for their seminars and lectures. Moreover, students are supposed to read academic texts and articles in order to prepare for their classes and exams.

Note-taking requires finding, thinking about and reordering information. If students think about what they read or listen and then write it in their own words, they memorise the information better. A good note-taking saves a lot of time later on, when writing assignments or studying for exams.

A combination of skills which might be crucial for success in college is effective writing. The term “encompasses a range of types, particularly papers written for an academic audience” (Burns and Sinfield 2012, 215). Effective writing is crucial when studying at college and writing essays, reports, BA papers or MA papers. Also, when writing, students are sorting and thinking about the information which results in remembering and understanding the topic.

Students have to memorize much information so that they would successfully pass their exams and studies in general. “We each have a combination of memory strategies that work best for us” (Cottrell 1999, 201). Students need to find their own

strategy that is the most suitable for them. If students know the way their brain works, and acquire memory skills, the memorizing is likely to be easier for them.

Studying at university requires dedicating much time to self-study. Students have to write assignments, prepare for exams and read so that they would be prepared for their classes. At the same time, they might work, meet their families and friends. In order to divide their time between all these activities, they need to master time management skills. These skills help them organize their study time so that they would not be behind with their school work and could be social in their free time.

Testing is one of the evaluation methods at universities. Nevertheless, many students do not know how to approach tests. In order to pass a test, students can follow test-taking skills. These skills concern both preparation for a test or its time management and orienting in a test.

Finally, presentation and communication skills are important when giving a presentation or making a speech. “A presentation is a formal talk of a set length on a set topic given to a set, knowable, audience” (Burns and Sinfield 2012, 319). The ability to present to an audience is a transferable skill (van Emden and Becker 2004, 1) which students can use in their work, studies or other situations in their lives. Everybody can talk but there is a difference between an ordinary talk and giving an effective oral presentation that is clear, well-structured and interesting. Even though presentations are popular assessments tool at university, many students find presenting difficult and terrifying.

2 Presentation skills

An effective and successful presentation can be achieved if the speaker applies relevant and effective presentation skills. Mastering these skills can help a presenter to overcome possible problems during presentation and make the preparation of the presentation easier. In order to give a presentation that could be clear for the audience, a speaker chooses from several presentation forms, follows the presentation principles and creates the presentation according to the environment they can work with.

2.1 Presentation forms

Presentation forms can be divided according to many criteria. One of them relates to the speaker's ability to memorize the presentation. If they are not, they need to use aids for support. Although each form has its pros and cons, some of them are more suitable for public speaking than other types.

Sometimes, people are supposed to make a speech without any longer preparation, e. g. if somebody asks them to give their opinion about a topic usually at a conference or a meeting. This presentation is called improvised. A person actually does prepare (if they are familiar with the topic) only in a matter of seconds. The disadvantage of this type is the lack of preparatory time, therefore, the speech can become chaotic.

Another presentation form is a presentation during which the speaker reads a coherent text. On one hand, the speaker does not have to remember anything and is not stressed about forgetting what they wanted to say. On the other hand, they are likely to lose connection and eye contact with the audience (Hall 2001, 3). Also, their

speech could get monotonous and boring because they tend to concentrate only on the text and not on the proper delivery.

While working with notecards, people do not read a full text because the notes which they have on small cards function as a guide. The advantage is that the notes help the students to remember what to say and when to say it. Using notecards is also a way to reduce stress and stage fright because the speaker does not have to remember all the numbers, data, citations etc., moreover, they will not transfer their tension into nonverbal display (Hospodářová 2007, 99).

Technical equipment as an aid for presenting (e. g. PowerPoint, an overhead projector, an interactive whiteboard etc.) also works as a source of notes for the presenter who further comments on them. If the text on the screen is not enough for them, they combine it with their own notecards.

The last form is a presentation which is learned by heart. This form impresses the audience but on the other hand, this presentation is the most demanding with a possibility that the speaker forgets the speech. The speaker must be confident and well versed with the topic. That way they can rely not only on their practised speech but also on their knowledge.

	Very formal	Formal	Informal	Very informal
Suitable occasion	Large conference	Smaller conference or group where you don't know the audience	Smallish group, probably internal, but not all known to you	Small team meeting where you know the other participants
Purpose	Provide information to a large number of people	Provide information, but also get reaction	Provide information, hear reaction, respond; possibly discuss	Provide information, or generate discussion
Stand or sit?	Stand	Stand	Stand or sit	Probably sit
Present from where?	A lectern	The front of the room.	Either within the group or from the front	Your place at a table, or within the group
Visual aids	Yes, slides controlled from the lectern. Can also use video or other multimedia.	Yes, slides, but kept fairly simple.	Yes, but keep them to a minimum.	Perhaps a one-page summary of your key points.
Sound systems/ microphone	Yes	Yes	Probably not	No
Type of room	Large conference hall	Conference room or meeting room	Meeting room or office	Meeting room or office
What will you have to provide in advance?	Copy of your slides	Copy of your slides	Handout of some sort	Nothing expected
Audience interaction	A formal question session afterwards is usual	Formal questions, but you may get interruptions during your presentation	Fairly interactive; up to you to handle questions or discussion during the session	Likely to be very interactive if you allow.

Figure 1: Presentation forms based on formality of the presentation

Also, presentation forms can be divided according to the formality of a presentation. Based on the occasion, the audience and the purpose of their speech, the presenter must consider what presentation method they are going to use. Each form has its demands and takes place in different conditions (see Figure 1¹).

2.2 Effective presentation principles

An effective presentation is based on many principles. Even a presentation with an interesting topic can be disastrous if the presenter does not think about the delivery at all. Proper preparation is essential when giving longer presentation and

¹<http://www.skillsyouneed.com/present/presentation-method.html>

concerns many problematic tasks from acknowledging the audience to overcoming one's fear of public speaking.

2.2.1 The structure

Presentations in general have three parts – an introduction, a body of the presentation and a conclusion. The introduction enables the speaker to make the first contact with the audience, introduce both themselves and the topic. It gives information about the structure and the course of the presentation. In the body the speaker talks about the topic in further detail following clear and logical structure. Finally, the conclusion shortly summarises the most important thoughts and often leads to the discussion. These are the main functions of the three parts but there are many component parts of each of them.

2.2.1.1. The introduction

Although an introduction is often ignored by the presenters, it is a key part of a presentation. It is the introduction which either engages the audience or disheartens them. Hospodářová (2007, 35) says that the presenter has only one minute to make contact with the audience which is also supposed to be persuaded about interestingness of the presentation and that it is beneficial for them to listen to it.

Greeting, thanking the audience and appreciating that they came makes a good first impression. If the presenter appreciates that the listeners came and made time to listen to the presentation, the audience will feel respected (Klarer 2007, 19). It may seem like a commonplace but this simple step could contribute to positive acceptance by the listeners.

The next part of the introduction is informing the audience about the presentation topic. The students cannot expect that everybody knows what the presentation is going to be about, even if it was announced in advance. People forget, come late, do not read handouts or simply are not fully paying attention, so it is useful to introduce the name of the topic not only at the beginning of but also during the introduction.

The listeners are likely to listen more attentively to the topic which they are interested in. They can be compelled to pay attention if the speaker explains to them that the topic relates to their activities, hobbies or their future. This method, which is called personalizing (Klarer 2007, 23), makes the topic less abstract and more familiar if the audience can see the benefit of listening to the presentation.

A short explanation of the presentation structure is needed for better orientation in the presentation. Burns and Sinfield (2012, 322) explain: “Without an agenda the audience does not know where the talk is going. This is unsettling and confusing. A confused audience is not a happy audience.” The topic should be divided into subtopics so that the audience would understand it when briefly explained. Gallo (2010, 7) advises to create three subtopics because the simpler the structure is, the simpler the remembering will be.

The speaker then informs the audience about the timing and a period of asking questions. The audience can be uncomfortable if they do not know how long the presentation will last. The presenter gives them a chance to mentally prepare for discussion by telling them. A room for asking questions can take place either during the presentation or after it. Van Emden and Becker (2004, 66) claim that people need

to be told when to ask questions, otherwise, they would not pay attention to the presentation or worry about being impolite.

2.2.1.2 The body of the presentation

The body of the presentation is the main part of delivering the presentation which consists of commenting in further details on the subtopics which have been mentioned in the introduction. Therefore, the success depends on a well-defined and understandable structure.

Firstly, the subtopics should be relevant. Students usually know more about the topic than what is needed to be told, so they must consider which subtopics really relate to the main topic. The number of subtopics should be 3-4 (see above), otherwise the audience might be confused, overwhelmed and it will be difficult for them to remember the information.

Secondly, logical structure and succession are crucial for presentation. The main thoughts follow one after another and are logically connected. The connections are essential for the audience to remember the information because people are able to remember more and with less effort if there is a clear coherence in the message (Klarer 2007, 46). The presenter can also point out the connection between the subtopics to help the audience in creating the links.

Lastly, the important step is to summarize the subtopic before proceeding to the next one. It allows the inattentive people in the audience to catch up on missed information. It is also a way to understand the connection with the following subtopic and an assurance that the audience understood the information correctly. Furthermore, these summaries are another aid for memorizing information. The

repetition should be done at the end of every subtopic except the last one. This might lead to two subsequent conclusions.

2.2.1.3 The conclusion

As Carnegie (2011, 211) says: “While the opening of a presentation should add up to a positive first impression, the conclusion should add up to a positive lasting impression.” The conclusion summarises the whole presentation and re-emphasises the most important points. This is the third time that the audience have heard the information – firstly in the introduction and then after every subtopic. The repetitive structure is required so that the audience remember the main information, even though this might seem senseless to the presenter (Burns and Sinfield, 2012, 323).

The conclusion also involves thanks to the audience for their attention, activity and staying until the end or simply for making time to listen to the presentation. After this, the presenter usually asks the audience for questions.

2.2.2 The audience

Every communication consists of at least two participants. As far as presentation is concerned, it is a communication between the speaker and the audience. In order to deliver a good presentation the audience becomes the presenter’s priority and their needs and prior knowledge of the topic are considered by the presenter. Nevertheless, to achieve this, the speaker must get to know their audience – the number of the listeners, their interests and prior knowledge, possibly their age and gender.

Unlike the seminar presentation where the speaker probably knows the number and prior knowledge of their audience, formal presentation requires further

preparation. The speaker must know what the listeners already know. Accordingly to their knowledge, the presenter chooses the depth of information for the presentation.

It is also necessary to know how many people will be in the audience so that the presenter would be aware of how many possible handouts they should prepare. The number of people in the audience also determines which visual aid can be used. According to van Emden and Becker (2004, 65), “if you have a small number in the audience, it might be acceptable to sit down while you speak, but if there are more than a dozen or so, you will need to stand.”

Perception of people differs according to their neuro-linguistic programming (Medlíková 2008, 22). Gallo (2010, 12) claims: „There are three types of learners: visual (the majority of people fall into this category), auditory (listeners), and kinesthetic (people who like to feel and touch).” Usually, people are a combination of at least two types and the audience consists of all types. Therefore, the presenter adjusts the presentation to all of them so that each person would be engaged.

The visual people create 80 % of population (Hospodářová 2007, 45) and prefer the visual stimulation such as PowerPoint presentation or other visual aids. They respond to pictures, graphs, photographs and other material. This type of people reads the text which is on the PowerPoint slides and it is important to let them finish the reading before the speaker continues talking.

The auditory learners are people who learn and perceive primarily by listening. Apart from listening they prefer discussion. The variety of tone of voice and intonation of the presenter is crucial for them because they respond to what they hear. The important part of the presentation for them is questions and answers at the end of or during the presentation.

Kinesthetic learners like dynamics, activity and experience. They are willing to participate in the presentation by being engaged in a competition, model situation etc. They need the presentation to consist of several different parts, not just the presenter talking but also a short video projection, mini quiz or anything interactive (Medlíková 2008, 24).

The attention span of people is limited. A person can usually concentrate for 30 minutes or less (Hospodářová 2007, 43). That is the reason why the presenter needs to constantly gain the attention of the audience by repeating, emphasizing, summarizing the information or asking questions. Visual aids or nonverbal signals also help the audience to retain the information.

2.2.3 Nonverbal communication

Communication between people does not only happen verbally but also by people's behaviour. Nonverbal communication influences the opinion which people have about others and can affect the meaning of the message that the speaker wants to deliver. It helps modify and support what is said in words.

Nonverbal communication includes paralanguage, such as volume, pauses, articulation etc. (see 2.2.5), kinesics behaviour which comprises emblems, illustrators, affect displays, regulators and adaptors. "Kinesics is the term used for bodily movement. Body movement includes the use of eye contact, facial expressions, posture, and gesture" (Pan 2014, 2628). Other parts of nonverbal communication are proxemics, physical characteristics and artefacts.

Emblems are symbols which can be translated into verbal expression (e. g. the peace sign). They are used when the verbal communication is not possible. Emblems

are most used in the sign language for the deaf or by people who work in places where spoken communication is unsuitable (e. g. scuba divers).

“Illustrators are nonverbal acts which are tied to, or accompany speech, and illustrate what is being said verbally” (Fatt 1998, 2). People use body language every day to demonstrate what they are saying because they want to be understood. For example, speakers often make movements and gestures when indicating an amount. For this purpose numbers can be demonstrated by lifted fingers. Naturally, gestures are connected with numbers which are being demonstrated by lifted fingers.

Vertical gestures are suitable for visualizing comparison of percents, numbers or money amounts. In contrast, horizontal gestures are used for illustration of time lines, phases or anything chronological. Also, gestures complement the verbs of motion.

In addition, presenters can use their hands as an extra visual aid. A claw (the thumb is separated from other fingers) is a universal gesture which allows the speaker to face the audience, maintain the eye contact and point at the same time. This gesture can be used when the presenter is sitting, standing or speaking from behind the rhetorical counter.

“Affect displays are simply the facial configurations which reveal emotional states” (Fatt 1998, 3). Generally, seven types of emotions can be distinguished and they are mostly double: happiness – unhappiness; surprise; fear; joy – sadness; peace – anger; satisfaction – dissatisfaction; interest – indifference (Mareš and Křivohlavý 1995, 109). Human face can be divided into three areas which express certain emotions:

- the area of a forehead to eyebrows shows fear, anxiety, concentration, surprise and awe,
- the area of eyes and eyelids expresses fear and sadness,
- the area of cheeks, nose and mouth shows happiness.

Facial expressions like frowning or smiling usually correspond with the content of the speech. The face also expresses the presenter's enthusiasm which increases the interest of the audience. For example "smile is one of the easiest and most commonly recognized signs of emotion; it suggest friendliness, contentment, shared experience" (van Emden and Becker 2004, 26) thus smiling is an ideal way not only to make a positive impression at the beginning but also at the end of the presentation.

"Regulators are nonverbal acts which serve to maintain the flow of speech and listening between interactants," explains Fatt (1998, 3). They include the movement of the eyes and the head. Head movements express agreement or disagreement. Motionless and stiff head holding might mean defiance and indifference. Eye contact is a key factor for engaging the audience in the presentation. The presenter starts communication with the listeners even before the beginning of the presentation by looking at them when entering the room. The speakers who maintain eye contact from the beginning and continue throughout the entire presentation (van Emden and Becker 2004, 25) show their openness and fearlessness. Moreover, they demonstrate that they are interested in the audience.

However, to persuade the listeners, the presenter must try to look at each individual person so that they do not feel overlooked. That might be difficult, especially if there are many people in the audience. Van Emden and Becker (2004, 25) mention that in this situation the speakers "make eye contact with different

people in different parts of the room, so that if a few people are missed, they will understand that you've at least tried to look in their direction" but it is not advisable to look over their heads because they would notice this action.

"Adaptors are among the most interesting, but most difficult to define, of nonverbal acts. They include postural changes and restless leg or arm movements" (Fatt 1998, 3). The posture is in many cases the first level of communication with the audience and indicates self-confidence, experience and peace. It is more pleasant for the listeners to listen to the speaker who is relaxed, prepared and forthcoming than to someone who seems nervous and distant. Therefore, the presenter must control their body language and the signals they are sending.

In some situations the presenter delivers their presentation while sitting. Either it is expected or it is an informal meeting where the people sit around one table. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for the presenter to stand and talk to them from above.

The presenter stands if the presentation is formal, there are more than a dozen people in the room (van Emden and Becker, 2004, 27) or the visual aids are needed. It is easier to speak while standing than sitting because the air passage is opened and the speaker can breathe freely, which is needed for speaking. Also, the speaker appears dominant and in the centre of the attention. They can better monitor the room, move if they need to and use a wider range of nonverbal communication.

Some speakers tend to walk during the presentation. Carnegie (2011, 31) says that the presenter must know where they are going and walking should look natural. For example, the speaker walks during a pause after they have finished talking about

one topic and they are going to begin a new one. Another purpose of walking is emphasizing the information by moving several steps forward towards the audience.

The basic posture is standing straight with the hands alongside the body. Keeping the arms along the body prevents the speaker from unnecessary movement of the hands when they do not use them for the gestures. This posture helps speakers seem confident and not as if they hide anything because their hands are not blocking the body. They do not look defensive, nervous or unfriendly. The disadvantage is that the speaker may appear stiff if they hold the posture for a long time.

It is a common problem that the speakers do not know what to do with their hands while speaking. Most people take a position in which their hands are in front of the body. The fingers are laced together or only the fingertips touch. Some speakers even rub their hands. If the presenter is nervous, they tend to move their hands without any purpose, which is often disturbing. They play with their rings, pull a cuff, touch the tie or open and close a pen. Also, rolling and straightening the notes is a display of nervousness.

The posture reveals the attitude of the speaker. The speaker who has both hands in his pockets is likely to appear indifferent or overly confident. Hands on the hips are a sign of a bossy and provocative person. People with hands crossed in front of the body and feet wide apart seem aggressive and dominating (Preston 2005, 4).

“Proxemics refers to the use of space in a given situation” (Pan 2014, 2627). When there is a closer relationship between a speaker and the listeners, a personal zone is minimal, while during common presentations to large audience the public zone requires ten or more feet. Keeping the distance means that the participants are

feeling safe because this way people see the face, hands and the posture of the person to whom they are talking.

In a proper communication people respect the space of the others. This applies to presentations, too. The speaker respects the territory of the audience, which means that they do not come too close and do not invade their personal space. On the other hand, reduction of the distance is a means of capturing the attention of the listeners. This is more appropriate than addressing them verbally which would interrupt the presentation.

The category of artefacts is related to objects such as perfume, clothing, cosmetics, and jewellery and their meaning in communication between people. The audience is looking not only at the face of the presenter but also at their clothes and overall appearance. Clothes express one's personal identity, social status and attitude toward other people (Hospodářová, 2007, 75). If the presenter dresses moderately, people subconsciously feel that a person who is dressed in a similar way shares their opinions. On the other hand, glittered or jingling jewellery might be distractive for the audience when the presenter moves. The audience pays attention to the hair, make-up and the neatness of the presenter, too. All the mentioned aspects affect the first impression which the audience gains.

2.2.4 Aids

There are very few people who are able to deliver a presentation and hold the audience's attention without any visual support. Visual aids are a part of any good presentation as they help the presenter illustrate complex and complicated phenomena. The use of visual aids increases the percentage of remembered

information by the audience by 43 % (Hospodářová 2007, 80) because the listeners perceive visually and by hearing at the same time.

Blackboards and chalks (or whiteboards and pens) are usually associated with school and teaching but can be used for presentation, too. The advantage is that they are mostly at the presenter's disposal. The presenter can make notes and erase them for example when a brainstorming is a part of the presentation. Blackboards are not electrical, so the speaker does not have to rely on electric power. However, the presenter must write in big letters and if they want their handwriting to be legible, it takes time.

Flipchart is an inexpensive mobile aid suitable for noting ideas. Moreover, the presenter can prepare the text in advance so that it would be legible. On the other hand, this visual aid is inconvenient if there are more people in the audience in a big room because not all the listeners will be able to see properly. Therefore, flipcharts are adequate for workshops and meetings than for presentations (Hospodářová 2007, 84).

An overhead projector represents an older variation of PowerPoint slides. It enables the presenter to prepare the visual aid in advance. "With the introduction of PowerPoint the overhead projector has become less popular but it is still useful for a brief, 5–10 minute, presentation" (Hall 2001, 27). The advantage is that the slides which are being projected can be seen even in big rooms. On the other hand, there are many conditions for the actual projecting, such as a screen, a dark room, and a place for the projector. Furthermore, the projector is noisy and disturbs the presenter.

Slides of PowerPoint presentation offer opportunities to include various demonstrative examples in the presentation. The presenter can use animations,

pictures, videos, sounds or graphs. It is easy and quick to prepare PowerPoint presentation which looks professionally. However, PowerPoint offers so many visual effects and possibilities for the speaker that they sometimes create slides which are overdecorated and unclear. Furthermore, the presenter is fully dependent on the technical equipment and “the biggest danger is that you are using the latest software, but the organisers are not” (Hall 2001, 19).

Handouts, unlike other visual aids, are meant for the audience to keep. They summarize important information, can include details about which the presenter will not talk and allow the listeners to return to the topic. Basically, handouts should inform about the topic even without the presenter (Klarer 2007, 96). On the other hand, they can distract the audience because the listeners are likely to read the handouts during the presentation and not listen to the speaker. Therefore, the presenter decides when the best time to dispense the handouts is – at the beginning, at the end or during the presentation.

Visual aids serve not only the audience but also the speakers. They often use them instead of notecards. However, some speakers forget that visual aids only illustrate the topic, not explain it. A common mistake is that the presenter writes their presentation text on the slides and then reads it. This way they ensure that they will not forget anything but they lose the attention of their audience who concentrate on the text. The presenter, not the visual aids, should always be in the centre of listeners’ attention. This means to comment on and explain everything that is on the slides, even if the slides material is understandable on its own (Klarer 2007, 107).

2.2.5 Voice

The key component of any presentation is the voice of the presenter and the success of their performance depends on how effectively they can use it. The speech can be varied by the voice aspect variety.

Voices in general can be divided into two groups – loud and soft. People associate loud voice with self-confidence (Koegel 2009, 78), therefore, the speaker appears strong and confident. Presenters who speak in loud voices have already the advantage of being heard and do not have to think about raising the volume of their voices which are very well heard even in big rooms. The disadvantage is that those people must consciously lower the voice volume in small places.

Soft voices are more common and must be developed. Speaking loudly enough may be problematic for people who speak softly because they feel like they are shouting if they raise their voice. People are either born with soft voices and must concentrate in order to speak loudly, or they speak this way only if they are nervous. In that case, they need to gain confidence and reduce the stage fright which is possible with practice.

The voice volume is connected to breath. “If you breathe well, you can increase the volume of sound that you produce just by pressing gently on the diaphragm, as you did when you were humming – much better than trying to force your vocal cords, which are delicate and easily injured” (van Emden and Becker 2004, 10). This principle helps the presenters to increase the volume so that the people sitting back in the room would hear them clearly.

The problem of many speakers is an excessively fast speech, especially if they are nervous and inexperienced. The presenter may think that the whole presentation

is going to be a failure and they want it to be over. Unfortunately, this approach has a negative impact on the audience. At first the listeners in most cases want to listen to the presenter and learn something new and interesting. However, if the speaker is rushing through their speech, there is no chance for the audience to understand the topic and think about what they hear. “As a result, they will remember very little information and feel that they have gained no long-term benefit from being present” (van Emden and Becker 2004, 12).

In contrast, it may seem that some people speak too slowly, which also affects the communication. Controlling the pace of speech is advisable but sometimes the speaker wants to speak slower and makes pauses in places where they do not belong. Therefore, as van Emden and Becker (2004, 10) say, the message is broken up too much and the meaning of the sentence becomes unclear because the pauses interrupt the chunks of words with one meaning. The pauses are the reason why it seems that the speaker is speaking slowly but in fact, the words may be said really quickly. The result of a speech which is too slow is that the audience gets bored and do not listen.

Clear articulation(pronouncing every part of a word clearly) is an essential speech condition if the audience is supposed to understand the presenter. The most frequent mistake, as far as articulation is concerned, is that the speech organs – lips, jaws, tongue, palate, vocal cords, uvula (Hospodářová 2007, 101) are not used fully because of almost motionless lips. The movements of the mouth are supposed to be almost exaggerated so that the listeners catch every sound.

The presenter’s speech must be variable in order to capture the audience and help them recognize the crucial points. “When talking, punctuation is replaced by changes in the tone of voice, pauses and gestures” (Hall 2001, 18).The speaker uses

changes in volume, tone and pace also for emphasis. They stress the key words, slow down, speak louder, pause and repeat the important information. After that, the presenter continues softer and slightly faster. This way the audience will know when the key point is being emphasised (van Emden and Becker 2004, 16) without the presenter directly telling them and when less important detail is being discussed.

Silence is a part of the speech from the very beginning of the presentation. The presenter waits for the audience to quieten and be ready to listen. Also, there are pauses in the speech when the visual aids are being manipulated with (changing slides, adjusting projector etc.). This silence is necessary and the presenter starts to speak after they are done with the manipulation so that the audience do not miss any information. Other pauses are essential for the listeners. Silence helps them understand where one topic ends and another begins. As mentioned above, pauses are a way of emphasis which alerts the audience of key points. Moreover, van Emden and Becker (2004, 21) say that it gives them the time for the process of listening, understanding and assimilating.

Nevertheless, some pauses are unintentional. These occur if the speaker forgets what they wanted to say. The solution is to look at the notes in silence and fluently continue. However, some people think that they have to say something to fill the pause in. The result is that they make hesitation sounds like *um*, *hmm* and *er* (van Emden and Becker 2004, 21) because they do not know what to say and the audience know that the speaker is having problems.

2.2.6 Stage fright

Fear of public speaking is one of the most common fears and it represents a difficulty which often occurs before the presentation, as Carnegie (2011, 46) says.

According to him, once the presenter is on stage and starts to speak, in most cases the fear disappears. “Performance anxiety (also referred to as stage fright) is a group of disorders affecting individuals in a range of endeavours, such as public speaking, sport, and the performing arts in dancing, acting, and music making” (Studer et al. 2011, 761). People are stressed because they want to deliver a great performance. Stage fright is a reaction to that stress.

A person needs stress for biological survival and coping with the surroundings and it is an excessive stress what is harmful. Stress cannot be avoided because it can be caused by almost anything. Therefore, the presenter must try to reduce the stimuli, which cause stress, and mentally and physically prepare for the presentation.

There are many situations which can cause performance anxiety. One of the reasons is that the presenter may remember being ridiculed after they failed in the classroom presentation. They were humiliated and thus they worry that the history will repeat itself. The presenter might also fear that the content of the presentation will not be good enough, the delivery will not be smooth, or the audience will notice the fear of the speaker

Stage fright affects not only the mental state of the speaker but also their physical condition. The pupils are dilated, the pulse is quicker, the person suffers from stomach ache, starts to sweat, their hands and legs are shaking. As a consequence, the facial muscles are stiff and the ability to speak is blocked.

Although the fear of public speaking is considered to be a negative issue, it has some positive effects. Stage fright causes mobilization of power due to catecholamine reaction (Medlíková 2008, 85). The presenter feels energized thanks to the hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol. There are two possible reactions to

this hormonal release. The first is that the speaker is immediately able to be active and feels as if they could run miles. Also, their senses are heightened. On the contrary, stress can cause that the speaker is paralyzed and starts to feel full of energy only after this state is over, which can take a long time.

The opposite phenomenon to stage fright is overconfidence. Overconfident speakers may tend not to be prepared adequately, which might display by insufficient knowledge of the subject. The lack of knowledge means that the speaker might not be able to answer the audience's questions. If the presenter does not take the presentation seriously, the audience will notice it. They will react by their own indifference and inattention.

3 Project

The project focuses on the investigation into the undergraduate students' presentation and communication skills. In order to find out how students cope with giving oral presentations, a structured questionnaire was developed, given to the students and then analysed.

3.1 Research questions

The main aim of the research was to find out whether the undergraduate students of English have any difficulties with presenting or not. Provided that they do, the goal was to identify which areas of giving presentations they consider as the most difficult. Finally, the research was supposed to suggest possible principles that would help the students improve their presentation skills.

3.2 Research methods

In December 2015, 75 undergraduate students of English at the Technical University in Liberec were asked to participate in a questionnaire that aimed to map their presentation skills. The students completed the questionnaire at the end of their English language classes. The questionnaire was returned by 73 students (97, 3 %). Of these students 52 (71 %) were female and 21 (29 %) male. Participants' age ranged from 20 to 38 years with an average of 22 years. 21 students are in their second year of study and 52 in their third year of study. All students participated voluntarily.

3.2.1 Questionnaire format

The structured questionnaire (Chráska 2007, Gavora 2010) consists of 15 items which are related to presentation and communication skills of undergraduate

students. Eight of the questions require choosing only one option and four items are scale questions. There are two questions with more possible answers and finally, the questionnaire includes one open question. For each question clear instructions are provided in order to eliminate possible ambiguities.

Items of the questionnaire are listed in the overview below:

- *Demographic data*: age, gender, year of study.
- *Frequency of students' presentations during an academic year*: Students were to circle one option out of four. They were asked whether they present a) not once, b) 1-3 times, c) 4-6 times, or d) more than above.
- *Subject of students' presentations*: Students were supposed to write what the most common subject of their presentations was, such as compulsory assignments following from lessons, speeches at public events etc.
- *Difficulty of presenting in English*: Students were asked to choose from options YES or NO to answer whether presenting in English is more difficult for them than in Czech. Furthermore, they were supposed to decide which areas of giving presentations in English are the most difficult for them. Students could choose from five options with several particularized options and tick all that applied – a) content (its originality, attractiveness and effectiveness), b) speech (clarity of the purpose and the topic of the speech), c) language (i. correct grammar, ii. appropriate use of vocabulary, and iii. clear pronunciation), d) delivery (i. being able to improvise, ii. effective use of body language, iii. handling visual aids and iv. time management), and finally, e) others, which provided space for the students to express themselves.

- *Stage fright*: One question asked the students whether they had stage fright. If their answer was YES, they also had to choose in which situation they suffer from stage fright. The students answered that they are nervous in front of a) people that the students do not know, b) people with expert knowledge, c) people that the students know, or d) always.
- *Visual aids and forms of presentations*: Three items were focused on the use of visual aids and on the presentation forms which the students use the most. The respondents were to choose whether they a) read the text from their notes, b) use cards with bullet notes, c) follow the notes in PowerPoint presentation commenting on them, or d) improvise, when they use PowerPoint. The second item differed from the first. It considered presentations without the use of PowerPoint. The options were the same with the exception of option c), which was replaced by c) recite the text by heart. Finally, the students were asked what visual aids they like to use. They could circle all the possibilities that applied: a) a blackboard, b) an interactive whiteboard, c) PowerPoint, d) a flipchart, e) an overhead projector, f) handouts, g) no aids, or h) others. In the last option the students were supposed to write their own answer.
- *Nonverbal communication*: Six items concerned nonverbal communication. Firstly, in a scale question the students ticked whether they realize that the audience is watching them while they are talking. They chose from the scale of *always*, *very often*, *sometimes*, *rarely* and *never*. The questionnaire also focused on the facial expressions of the presenters and whether they are aware of them. The students responded by choosing an option on a

scale which was the same as in the previous item. The next item was related to the use of body language, such as gestures and miming. The respondents ticked an option on a scale. Also, the students decided whether they perceive the listeners or only focus on the content of their speech. Another item asked the students whether they prefer to a) stand, b) sit, or c) walk around the room while presenting. The last item focusing on nonverbal communication concerned working with voice. The respondents were to choose on the scale how often they try to work with the speed, volume of their voice, articulation etc.

- *Individual preferences*: In the last item of the questionnaire, the students circled what the most important thing, in their opinion, is while presenting. They chose from a) right content (selection and structure of key points), b) right design (interesting, clear), or c) right delivery (PowerPoint, print-outs, projector, etc.).

3.2.2 Questionnaire evaluation

In the first phase the data from the questionnaire were processed quantitatively. In order to evaluate the data, descriptive analysis was applied. In some questions the number of 73 respondents was invalid because the students did not choose any option or chose more options than assigned in spite of the instructions. These answers were not included in the results of the research.

The answers to the questions of the questionnaire are presented in the same order as they were asked and the results are displayed in graphs and described verbally. The values in the graphic entries are stated in percentage or in numbers (in questions with more possible answers).

Question no. 1:

The answers to the first question show that 62 % of undergraduate students of English give an oral presentation 1-3 times during an academic year, 34 % 4-6 times, 3 % more than 6 times and only 1 % of the respondents do not present at all during an academic year. This means that the majority of the students have an experience with presenting. Therefore, it is likely that they face or faced certain difficulties while giving a speech.

Question no. 2:

It follows from the second question that the students mostly present (96 %) because it is a part of their assignments at the university. The remaining 4 % give speech at various events.

Questions no. 3 and 4:

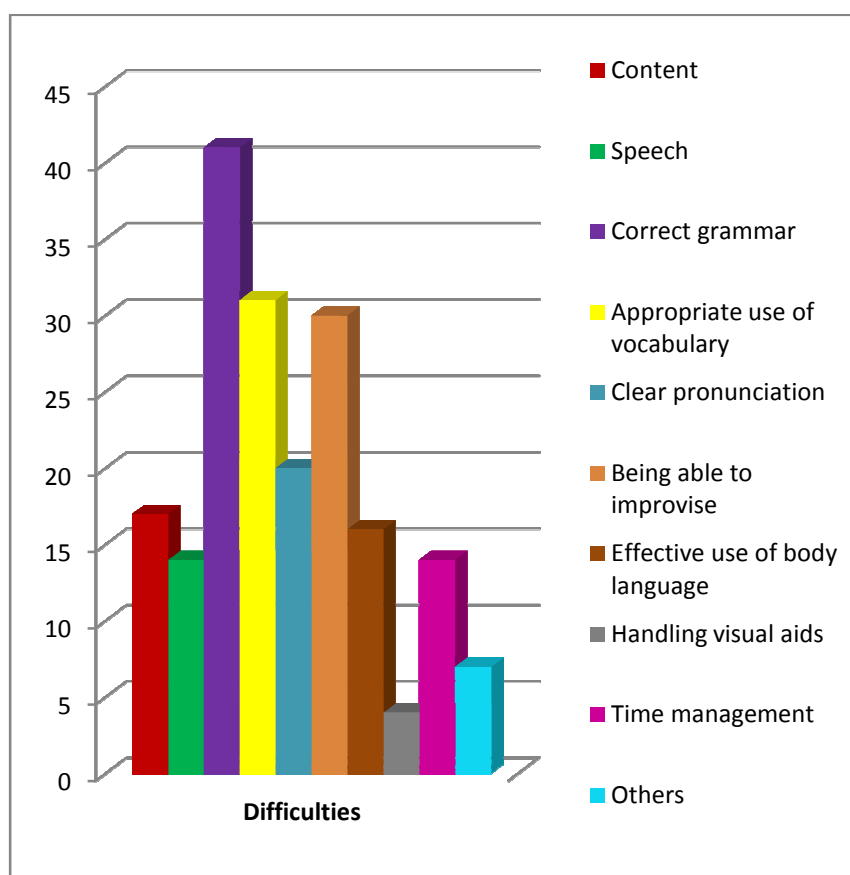


Figure 2: The most frequent difficulties in giving presentations

The answers to questions no. 3 and 4 indicate that 62 % of the students find it more difficult to present in English than in Czech. The diagram shows that the most frequent reasons of the difficulties are language (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) and delivery, improvisation in particular. Seven respondents also stated that they have difficulties with stage fright, lack of confidence, problems with regular breathing and technical equipment. It is likely that since the students present in front of a teacher and other students, the correct use of language is the most difficult for them.

Question no. 5:

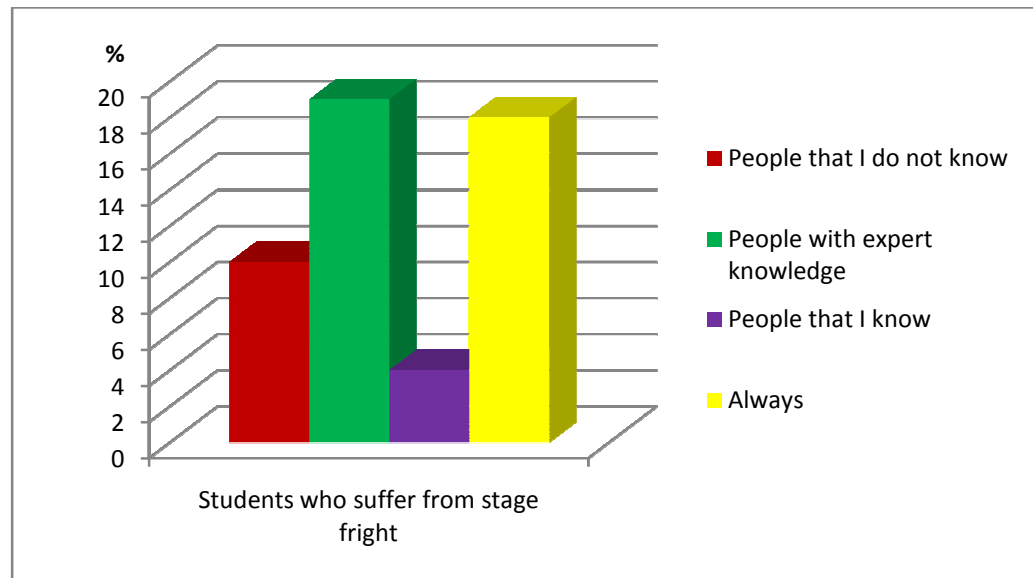


Figure 3: The audience in front of which the students suffer from stage fright

In question 5 it was discovered that 89 % of the students suffer from stage fright while they present. Of those who responded that they have stage fright 37 % are nervous about talking in front of people with expert knowledge and 35 % of students stated that they suffer from public speaking anxiety every time that they give a speech. It can be expected that giving a presentation is difficult for the students who have stage fright in spite of a perfectly prepared presentation.

Question no. 6:

The results of the following question demonstrated that 36 % of students are very often aware that the audience is watching them during a presentation. 33 % of the respondents always realize this, 26 % answered sometimes, 3 % rarely and 1 % never. It can be assumed that the students, being aware that they are being watched, realize that they have to pay attention to their behaviour while they present.

Questions no. 7 and 8:

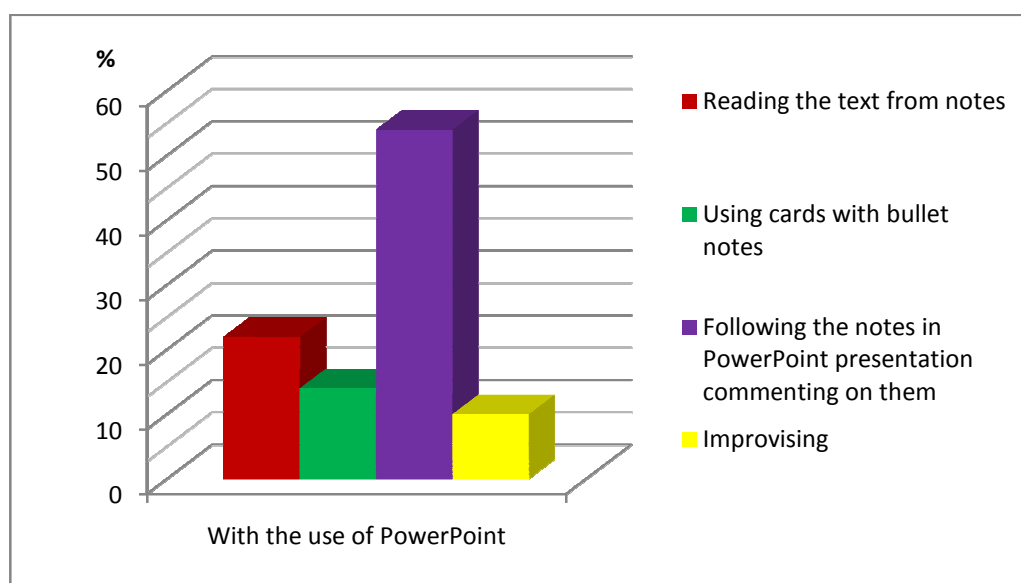


Figure 4: Presentation forms with the use of PowerPoint

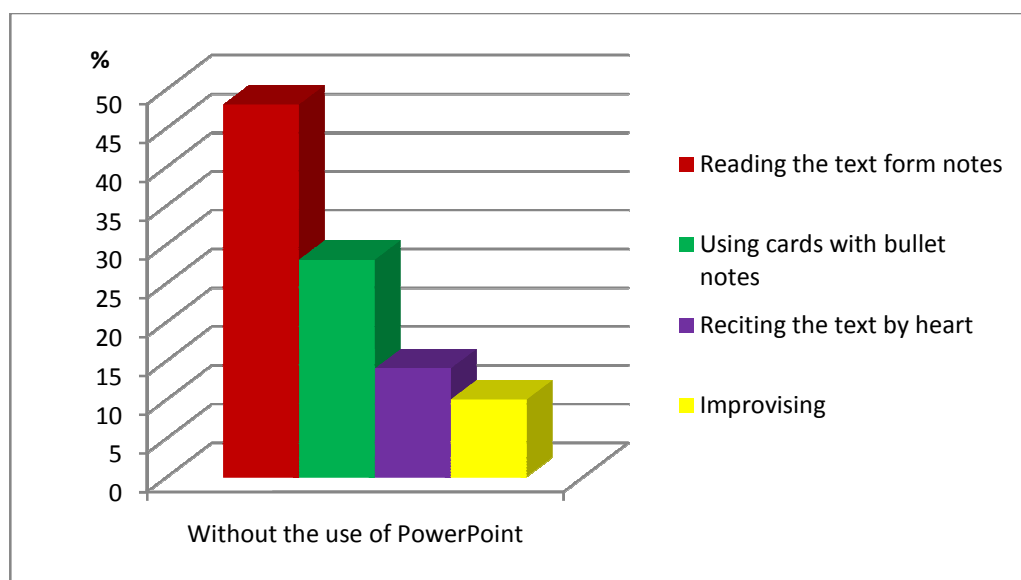


Figure 5: Presentation forms without the use of PowerPoint

Questions number 7 and 8 studied presentation forms of the students' presentations (with and without the use of PowerPoint). The diagrams show that the same number of students improvises while presenting. Otherwise, the two

possibilities considerably differ. With the use of PowerPoint 54 % of the students follow the notes in the PowerPoint presentation, while without the use of PowerPoint most students (48%) read the text from their notes. This might indicate that the students' PowerPoint presentations contain quite detailed notes rather than key points. That would mean that the students could only read the text from the slides as they do from their notes without the use of PowerPoint.

Question no. 9:

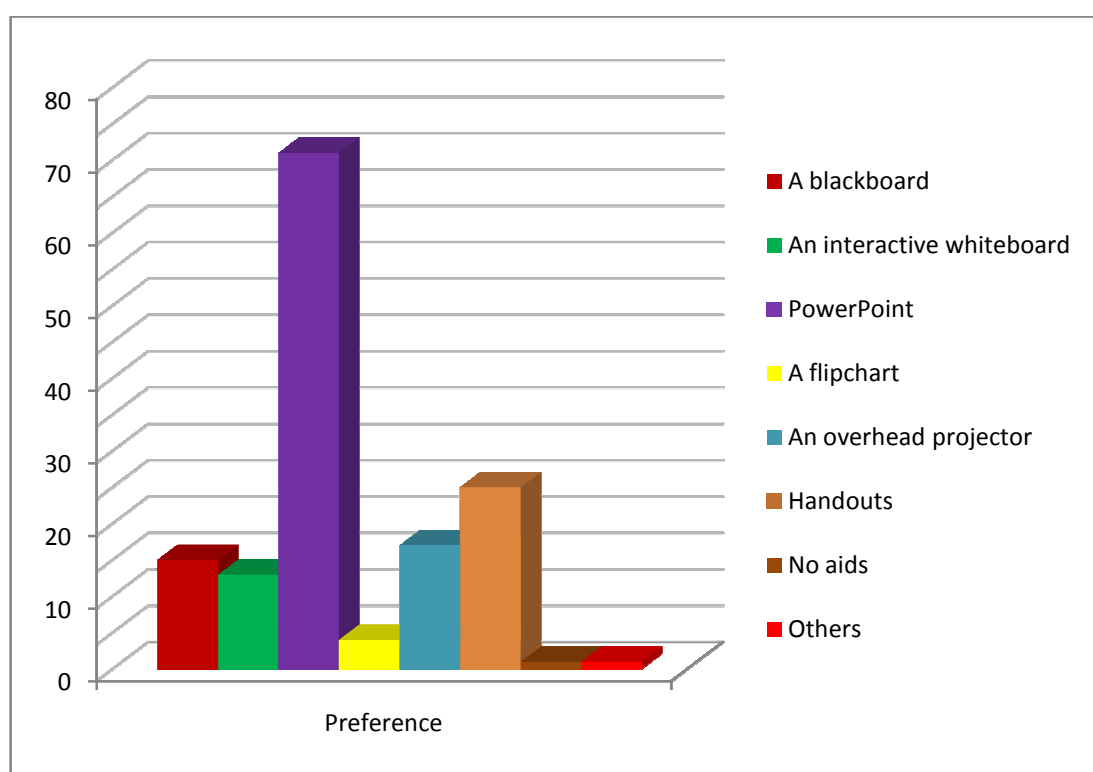


Figure 6: Students' preference for using visual aids

The diagram illustrates proportional representation of types of visual aids which the students prefer using. The most used aid is PowerPoint, significantly less frequent are handouts, an overhead projector, a blackboard or an interactive

whiteboard. One respondent stated that the choice of an aid depends on the subject that they focus on in their presentation.

Question no. 10:

Answers to question no. 10 show that the students prefer to stand while they present (71 %) and almost the same amount of the students answered that they like sitting (15 %) or walking (14 %) while they give a talk. This might indicate that the students present to larger audience and need to stand in order to see everyone.

Question no. 11:

As for the students' facial expressions during presenting, 31 % of the respondents claimed that they are *sometimes* aware of it, 24 % chose the option *very often*, 20 % *rarely*, 14 % *always* and 11 % *never*. These results indicate that majority of the students use nonverbal communication, particularly mimics, consciously when presenting.

Question no. 12:

The questionnaire shows that most students try to work with their voice *very often* (39 %), *sometimes* (29 %) or *always* (16 %). Only 11 respondents do not use paralanguage, such as speed, volume of voice or articulation. 13 % of the students marked *rarely*, and only 3 % marked *never*. The possible reason why they do not pay attention to their voice might be the fact that they do not realize it is important.

Question no. 13:

The answers to the question no. 13 displayed that 63 % of the respondents perceive the listeners. Therefore, it is likely that the students try to keep contact with the audience and catch their attention.

Question no. 14:

Question no.14 asked the students whether they purposefully use their body language. The majority of the students uses nonverbal communication *very often* (44 %) or *always* (13 %). The rest of the students do not work with body language frequently – 26 % of the respondents answered *sometimes*, 15 % *rarely* and 2 % *never*. Although majority of students uses body language, it cannot be assumed that they use it properly and effectively. The students might use body language but might not be aware of what particular movements mean.

Question no. 15:

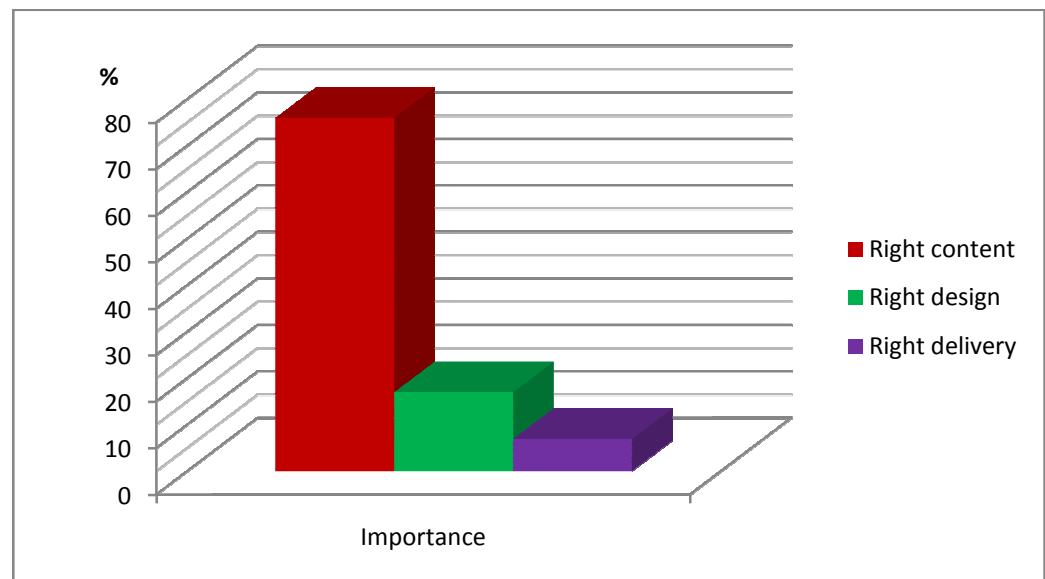


Figure 7: Presentation components importance

Finally, the respondents answered what the most important thing for them is, as far as presenting is concerned. The majority (76 %) answered that right content is what matters the most to them. The second most frequent answer was right design (17 %) and lastly, right delivery (7 %). This shows that the students are aware of the

fact that if the content is clear for the audience, imperfect delivery and design do not have to spoil the whole presentation.

4 Suggestion of effective presentation principles

The research showed that stage fright, appropriate use of visual aids, delivery and language might be problematic for the students when they give presentations. The following principles were completed in order to help the students make presenting as easy as possible for them.

4.1 Stage fright

As mentioned above, people cannot avoid stress completely and can only reduce the stimuli. The first step to reduce stage fright is to thoroughly prepare the presentation. If the speaker practised the speech, checked the validity of information and prepared the visual aids, he or she should not be nervous about explaining the content or forgetting the speech. It is demanding to learn the whole talk by heart but the speaker can learn at least the introduction and the conclusion so that they would be more confident. This allows them to concentrate on their nonverbal communication with the audience and natural performing.

Secondly, public speaking anxiety influences the posture (the shoulders and neck are stiff etc.) and breathing of the presenter. Carnegie (2012, 50) says that the speaker should breathe deeply half a minute before the presentation. The presenter takes a deep breath and then slowly breathes out. Proper breathing relaxes the muscles. If the speaker is nervous during the presentation, they can use this method when the audience are looking elsewhere, e. g. at a visual aid. There can be moments during a presentation when the speaker might begin to panic, for example, they forget what they wanted to say, their notes are not in the right order etc. Taking a deep breath can help them to overcome the incident and calm themselves.

Moving is another way to manage stress. Simply walking or stretching causes the speaker to be relaxed. Also, their posture will improve.

Relaxed psyche is impossible to achieve without satisfaction of some of the basic needs. It is advisable not to present while being hungry. Hunger increases the feeling of discomfort and the speaker feels unwell. The body needs sugar so that it would be able to function properly. Chocolate or food with guarana is recommended when facing stress (guarana is a plant rich in caffeine).

Also, the presenter needs to be aware of their fluid intake not only before the presentation but also during the speech. Warm drinks like tea moisturize the mucous membrane in the mouth which dries out when the presenter speaks. Medlíková (2008, 88) says that people should avoid coffee because it dehydrates the body. Milk is a source of mucus which sticks to the vocal chords and makes the speaker cough. Cocoa makes people thirsty and mineral water or soda is also unsuitable.

Next, presenters who are nervous in front of people that they do not know or people with expert knowledge can concentrate on one person whom they know. The speaker may imagine that they are presenting only for the known person. Nevertheless, the speaker should always maintain eye contact with the rest of the audience.

Finally, presenting must be practised. “Fear comes from lack of confidence. Lack of confidence comes from lack of practice” (Carnegie 2012, 50). In order to keep a cool head and be confident, one must gain experience in public speaking.

4.2 PowerPoint slides

PowerPoint is one of the most used tools for creating presentation slides and the most used visual aid by the students. However, as the students stated, the right

design is not a priority from them when presenting. The most common mistake is that the students' slides are overdecorated or contain too much text. The following tips help make clearly arranged slides which highlight the main points.

Firstly, "it is better to use several slides to get your points across rather than cram everything on to one single slide" (Hall 2001, 37). The slides should be uncluttered and well arranged. The information is written in bullet points, not in whole sentences (except for citations of definitions) because the text represents only the structure of the presentation. There should be a maximum of six bullet points on one slide. The text should be simple – written in one font size (24 minimum) and in clear font so that the audience could read the text easily. The presenter should always check for any spelling mistakes which could distract the audience.

Colours of the slides are also important. The background of the slides should be light with dark text because this combination is more legible than dark background with light text. Furthermore, the colours must be contrasting and legible from the distance. Black and blue colours are used for the text, red and green for highlighting. Hospodářová (2007, 94) says that there should not be more than three colours on a slide.

PowerPoint offers many possibilities as far as visual effects are concerned but animations should be used only if the presenter wants to support the content. It is advisable to animate text so that the bullet points would appear one by one if the presenter does not want the audience to read the bullet notes in advance. Any other textual effects are undesirable.

The same approach applies to graphs or pictures which should be in balance with the text. They should be simple and clear. If the graph is complicated and

cannot be simplified graphically, the presenter must do it verbally (Klarer 2007, 101). As said above, the speaker should comment on every item on the slides.

A useful tool in PowerPoint presentation is pressing a “B” key. If the presenter presses this key, the screen will be black and the audience will not be able to see the slides. This mechanism can be used while summarising a subtopic, the whole presentation, or simply if the presenter wants the audience to concentrate on them and not on the screen.

4.3 Language

The participants of the research stated that they are uncertain about their use of English during presenting. As for grammar, the only way to improve is to study and practise. Also, if the students speak more slowly, they are likely to make fewer mistakes because they have more time to think about what they want to say.

The appropriate use of vocabulary is essential for presenting accurate information. The speaker should learn the vocabulary for their presentation according to the topic of the speech. Learning synonyms provides the speaker with wide choice of words to use. Therefore, it is easier for the presenter to recall at least some of the words needed for the presentation. This prevents the speaker from long thinking about a suitable word while presenting.

Some students claimed that they find improvisation difficult. The key to being able to improvise is to do a thorough research and be prepared. If the speaker is well versed in the topic, they are able to talk about it with ease. It is useful to work with notecards which prevent the presenter from forgetting the data or any important information. People who are not native speakers are advised to learn some phrases

which can help them with their improvisation. Klarer (2007, 19-72) and Lowe and Pile (2006, 15-60) provide a list of the most useful ones:

Thanking

- First of all, let me thank you all for coming today.

Greetings

- Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.
- Good morning/afternoon/evening.

Introducing

- For those of you who do not know me, my name is...
- Let me introduce myself, I'm...

Topic

- As you all know, my presentation today will focus on...
- What I'd like to present to you today is...
- The purpose of my presentation is ...

Making the topic relevant for the audience

- My topic is of particular interest for those of you who...
- Since you'll all have to deal with this particular issue soon, my presentation will help you in...
- Today's topic will be very important for you because...

Reference

- You don't need to take any notes – I've got some handouts.
- If you look at the next slide, you can see...
- This graph shows...

Referring to other parts of the presentation

- As I mentioned earlier, ...
- As I have (just) said...
- I'll return to that (later).
- I will speak about that (in a moment).

Parts

- I've divided my presentation into three parts...
- I'll focus on three major issues...
- I'll look at three points in particular

Sequencing

- First, we'll look at...; then we'll...; and finally, we'll take a look at...
- I'll start out with...; next I'll move on to...; and I'll end with...

Timing

- My presentation won't last more than 20 minutes.
- It'll take me less than half an hour to cover these points.
- This will take about 15 minutes of your time.

Questions

- I'd like to ask you to hold your questions till the end.
- There will be time for questions after my presentation.
- In order to bring everybody to the same level of understanding, I'd like to give you a general overview first, and answer questions in the discussion period after my presentation.
- If you have any questions, feel free to interrupt me at any time.
- Don't hesitate to ask questions during my presentation.

- Please share your questions with us as they come up; I'll be happy to answer them right away.

Indicating the end of a section

- This brings me to the end of my first point.
- So much for point one.

Summarizing a point

- Let me briefly summarize the major issues.
- The important things to remember here are...

Thanking at the end

- Thank you for your attention.
- Thank you for listening.

Transitions

- Okay, this brings me to my next point.
- Let au take a closer look at that question in my next point...
- This leads directly to my next point...

Indicating the end of the main part

- Having covered this final point, I'm now approaching the end of my presentation.
- This brings me to the end of my presentation.

Summarizing

- Before I stop, let me go through the major issues once more.

Admitting that you do not know

- I'm afraid I don't know the answer to your question.
- Unfortunately, I'm not in a position to answer this question.

4.4 Delivery

The research showed that delivery is the least important for the students while presenting. However, right delivery is a very important means of engaging the audience in the presentation. Although an imperfect delivery does not have to spoil the presentation, it should not be neglected by the presenters.

Generally, it is more suitable to stand during a presentation. The speaker is in the centre of the audience's attention and can speak and breathe more comfortably than in a sitting position. Both feet should be firmly on the ground, hip width apart. The presenter can hold small notecards in one hand, which allows them to use gestures.

As far as using gestures is concerned, it is advisable to use any of in the area above the waist and under the shoulder line (Koegel 2009, 74). Gestures should be used naturally as a visual aid which accompanies the content of the speech. After the speaker makes a gesture, they let their hands fall alongside the hips. The presenter must also concentrate on using both hands equally because right-handers tend to use the right hand more and vice versa.

The students who use visual aids should not talk to the aids but always to the listeners. If they do not look at the audience, they appear unprepared. To prevent turning their back to the audience, the tips of the toes should point to the listeners. This makes the speaker return to the original posture – facing the audience. If the speaker wants to show the audience a visual aids which they hold in their hands, they should raise the aid in front of their chest, keep their head up and keep eye contact with the audience.

As mentioned above, it is not necessary to look at each person in the audience but the presenter should look in every direction. The presenter can remember particular people in various spots in the audience and keep eye contact with them in turns while speaking. Another option is to follow the imaginary line of the letter “M” or “W” (Klarer 2007, 91), which helps to create the illusion that the presenter looks at everybody.

As for voice, it is clear that the presenter must talk loudly enough so that the people at the back row could hear properly. Moreover, the speaker needs to distinctly articulate to be understood. According to van Emden and Becker (2004, 15), the students should imagine that there are people who have hearing difficulties and need to lip-read in the room. The speaker needs to open their mouth and slightly exaggerate their mouth movements. This will make the students articulate and face the audience while talking.

The research indicates that the students read the text from their notes when they do not use PowerPoint. This is not an ideal way of delivery. They should prepare small cards with bullet notes so that they would not lose eye contact with the audience. The presenter then follows the structure of the notes and speaks in their own words. It is essential that the notes are not in full sentences and do not contain any detailed information (except citations, exact data etc.). The text should be legible and large enough for the presenter to read.

Conclusion

The research showed that the students do have difficulties while presenting, which could have been expected, as presenting is one of the most difficult skills to master, demanding a combination of communication, interpersonal as well as technical competences.

The research result proved that the most serious problem, mentioned by the students, is stage fright. Thus, it is necessary that the students learn how to cope with stress so that they would be able to give presentations without any fear of public speaking. In fact, stage fright is an issue which the students must face in many other aspects of their studies, such as exams and state exams. Therefore, if they know how to reduce stress and nervousness before an important event, they will improve their performance.

Due to anxiety, the result of an exam is in many cases unsatisfactory although the students might be perfectly prepared. Stage fright affects them so much that they are not able to demonstrate their knowledge at a proper level. Therefore, it would be advisable to open a course in which the students could practise techniques and strategies to reduce and manage fear and anxiety.

The results from the questionnaire also showed that the most frequent difficulty is giving presentation in English. The students find it problematic because while delivering a content of a presentation in a clear and logical way, they have to pay attention to accuracy of their speech (i. e. grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary). These difficulties could be assumed since English is the second language of the students and they are still learning it and trying to improve their language skills.

The least problematic issue, according to the students, is delivering the subject matter. They consider the way of delivering a topic the least important because clear structure and content can partially compensate for poor delivery. Nevertheless, the least importance assigned to delivery does not mean that it should be neglected. This result only shows that delivery on its own cannot result in a convincing and interesting speech, for delivery is not the only aspect of the whole process of giving a presentation.

Even if the research revealed several useful and practical conclusions about the university students' skills, the limitations of the study should be acknowledged. The research is limited because it concerns a narrow group of students. First of all, due to the low number of respondents, the results cannot be generalized and considered indisputable. Furthermore, the investigation into the students' presentation skills was conducted by means of only one research method, which cannot disclose the issue in depth.

Nevertheless, the research can still serve as an insight into the problems which the students face during their university studies. For more applicable purposes, further research should focus on other aspects of the issue (e. g. audience's perception of the students' performance) by means of employing alternative research methods, such as observations or interviews.

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Table of Appendices

Questionnaire

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Dear students,

my name is Alena Nyčová and I am writing my bachelor thesis called Presentation and Communication Skills in English of Undergraduate Students. In some classes, the students are required to give oral presentations using notes, handouts, overhead projector, PowerPoint presentation or other presentation software. However, public speaking is difficult, even frightening for many students. Therefore, the purpose of this questionnaire is to find out difficulties which the students of English face while preparing and giving academic oral presentations in front of others. The results of the questionnaire will be used to learn more about the students' presentation skills, and to propose techniques for making public speeches as easy and effective as possible.

Your participation is completely voluntary and anonymous.

Age: Sex (tick): male female Year of study:

How often do you give an oral presentation during an academic year (i.e. two semesters)? (Please circle one option.)

- a. Not once
- b. 1-3 times
- c. 4-6 times
- d. More than above

- 2) What is mostly the subject of your presentations? Please write your answer
(e. g. compulsory assignments following from lessons; speeches at public
events etc.):

.....

.

- 3) Giving presentation in English is more difficult for me than in Czech.

(Please circle one option.)

YES – NO

- 4) When giving presentations in English, I have difficulties with:

(Please circle all that apply.)

- a. Content (originality, attractiveness, effectiveness)
- b. Speech (clarity of the purpose and the topic of the speech)
- c. Language:
 - i. Correct grammar
 - ii. Appropriate use of vocabulary
 - iii. Clear pronunciation
- d. Delivery:
 - i. Being able to improvise
 - ii. Effective use of body language
 - iii. Handling visual aids
 - iv. Time management
- e. Others: (Please write your answer.)

.....

- 5) I have a stage fright when I am giving an oral presentation: (Please circle one option)

YES – NO

If YES, I am afraid to talk mostly in front of: (Please circle one option.)

- a. People that I do not know
- b. People with expert knowledge
- c. People that I know
- d. Always

- 6) I realize that the audience is watching me while I am talking: (Please tick one option.)

Always Very often Sometimes Rarely Never

- 7) During my presentation **with** the use of PowerPoint, I most often:

(Please circle one option.)

- a. Read the text from my notes
- b. Use cards with bullet notes (in main points)
- c. Follow the notes in PowerPoint presentation commenting on them
- d. Improvise

- 8) During my presentation **without** the use of PowerPoint, I most often:

(Please circle one option.)

- a. Read the text from my notes
- b. Use cards with bullet notes (in main points)
- c. Recite the text by heart
- d. Improvise

- 9) When I give a presentation, I like to use: (Please circle all that apply.)

- a. A blackboard

- b. An interactive whiteboard
- c. PowerPoint
- d. A flipchart
- e. An overhead projector
- f. Handouts
- g. No aids
- h. Others: (Please write your answer)

.....

10) When I give a speech, I usually prefer to: (Please circle one option.)

- a. Stand
- b. Sit
- c. Walk around the room

11) While talking, I am aware of my facial expressions: (Please tick one option.)

Always Very often Sometimes Rarely Never

12) When I present, I try to work with my voice (speed, volume, articulation etc.):

(Please tick one option.)

Always Very often Sometimes Rarely Never

13) While giving a presentation, I: (Please circle one option.)

- a. Perceive the listeners
- b. Do not perceive the listeners and only focus on the content of the speech

14) While giving a presentation, I tend to use body language (gestures, miming):

(Please tick one option.)

Always

Very often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

15) When I prepare my presentation, the most important thing for me is:

(Please circle one option.)

- a. Right content (selection and structure of key points)
- b. Right design (interesting, clear)
- c. Right delivery (PowerPoint, print-outs, projector, ...)

Thank you for your help!